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SUBJECT Local Travel Conditions/Observations on Culture

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1. "We sailed from Naples on 14 June 1953 (S.S. Enotria for Alexandria, went by rail to Cairo where we obtained extensions of our Ethiopian visas and entry visas to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and were very fortunate in getting space on the Sudan Government steamer which came from just north of Asswan to Wadi Halfa. All the steamer space was completely booked for a month, but someone cancelled his reservations at the last minute! We left Cairo by train at 8 p.m. on 21 June, arriving at the embarkation point at Shailal the following morning. The steamer, an old, stern-wheeler, left at 4 in the afternoon lashed to two, canvas-covered barges which were filled to overflowing with third-class passengers, their baggage, and freight. In the next two days I spent most of my time examining the interesting villages clustered along the Nile with binoculars and asking questions of Sudanese on the boat. The Nile in June is at a very low ebb; not until July do the torrential rains falling on the Ethiopian Highland reach the main stream. The pilot maneuvered the boat back and forth across the entire breadth of the stream with great skill. On the second day the waters were so low that the ship could proceed no farther and all the passengers were transferred to smaller boats to continue on. At one point it was necessary for sailors to jump ashore in knee-deep mud with a rope to steady the boat in a particularly narrow passage. The next noon we passed through the Sudanese customs and entrained for Khartoum...magnificent trains for this part of the world (though very slow: the roadbed was constructed for the supply of Kitchener's army in the campaign against the Mahdist forces). The train passed first through barren desert inhabited only by nomads and by railroad service crews (the latter supplied with water and food by train), then at Abu Hamid we reached the Nile again following it until Khartoum which we reached on 26 June. Two days later we left by Aden Airways to Asmara, Eritrea.

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2. "The Sudanese appear to be far less hostile to the West than do the Egyptians; the nationalism of the Sudan, such as it is, seems to be more genuinely directly against the real economic problems of the country and there is a sense of pride (there is very little begging compared to Egypt or Ethiopia), and yet an eagerness to learn, an ease of living, and a sense of humor that appeals to Americans. In terms of culture history and geography the Sudan has been little touched. Recently a little book called Sudan Geography by Hodgkin was published, but it was written for Sudanese secondary schools and cannot serve American university needs very well. In casual questioning I discovered that there are non-Moslem, pig-keeping peoples in the Nuba Mountains south of El Obeid and at Karmuk near the Ethiopian border. Pig-keeping, so far as I know, has been reported only in scattered places in the Senhar area in the northern Sudan at the present time. These pig-keeping peoples would, I feel, be worthy of study, perhaps providing insight into the pre-Moslem occupation patterns of the area. Unfortunately, the continuous Moslem encroachment on these pagan peoples of the Nuba Mountains (which will be accelerated when the British policy of separation and protection of non-Moslems is discontinued in three years) may mean that we haven't much time left to observe and record the cultures of these peoples.
3. "Another interesting fact I became aware of for the first time is the importance of the pilgrimage to Mecca in spreading culture. Pilgrims often work their way across the entire length of the Sudan from West Africa in an effort to reach Mecca. Often, however, they are not able to make it all the way back home and they settle permanently as individuals or in small groups among other peoples. Sometimes they work just long enough to pay costs for an additional leg of their journeys and then move on...providing an important, reliable agricultural labor force. I have heard, though not confirmed, a report of a tribe of West African origin settled along the Brit-Sudanese border...on a pilgrimage.
4. "After remaining in Asmara for almost a week (our flight was cancelled) and making an interesting side trip to Massawa and north along the coast, we arrived in Addis Ababa, where we have been since, seeing various officials here and seeking to obtain the fullest support before leaving for Gondar. Ethiopia is a land of intrigue, of feudal elements that can and do hamstring many well-meaning scientific efforts. Local people refuse to cooperate with anyone who asks questions of quantity, or who tries to make field measurements (this because of fear of taxation or perhaps because of suspicion of foreigners). Thus, to get along at the village level one must give up the idea of mapping and measurement favored by geographers at home.
5. "A few days ago I met the Governor of Bege-medir Province, Dejasmach Assefate Kassa, and received his approval. He offered us a government house in Gondar, an interpreter, and armed...all without charge. Governor Kassa studied at Oxford and speaks English fluently. He is eager to reestablish the importance of Gondar economically and in the cultural life of the nation. He is interested in my work insofar as it will aid him in understanding the economy of Bege-medir. If I had wished to do work of a sociological or social anthropological nature - or in physical anthropology, I would not have been as well received. Nevertheless, sociological work particularly is urgently needed in Ethiopia, though it can be done only in a very limited sense if at all at the present time. I feel that there are tremendous opportunities for research in Ethiopia - valuable work needs to be done and can be done here, if one needs to proceed slowly and to follow protocol carefully.
6. "In my financial estimates, I made one major miscalculation: failure to allow for costs of local transportation. Everyone here, from Governor Kassa to the US Charge d'Affaires, is sure that a Jeep or Land Rover is essential to any sort of field work here. In the provinces there are no public transportation facilities, and even interprovincial surface travel can often be made only by hitchhiking rides with infrequent trucks or jeeps. A used Land Rover (which is lighter and reportedly better able to get through mud and sand than the Jeep) sells here for about \$25,000, at a US\$1000, of which one half to two thirds is recoverable on sale, I am told. Gasoline costs are high; in Gondar gasoline is about US\$.63 a gallon but in more accessible places it is somewhat less."

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